

OUR STORY

From the Desk Of Zeynep

Galen Leather

HANDMADE LEATHER
TRAVEL GOODS

As a graduate in a Geophysics Engineering program, I spent ten years in advertising and sales, working with the public to promote products and achieve higher sales numbers each year. My husband and I had recently had a small child and we worked hard to provide for him the best life possible. Everything about our lives seemed perfectly normal and we had no reason to believe that anything about that was going to change. Unfortunately, reality would prove us wrong about our assumptions.

In 2012, our life changed dramatically. I was diagnosed with Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma; a rare type of head and neck cancer. The doctor told me that I would be fine once treatment was completed but I would be incapable of speaking for approximately one year. The proclamation was alarming. I was still young. I had a four-year-old little boy. My career depended on my ability to speak.

Even still, I knew I had to do whatever it took and so I pushed myself through the treatments. It was a painful four months of surgery and radiotherapy. As the Doctor had warned, I couldn't speak and was restricted to only drinking liquids. Without the ability to speak, I was no longer able to speak with customers and make sales. My career was over. This forced me to look for a new job model that would allow me to work without speech.

My husband and I have always been interested in vintage products including leather goods and traditional Turkish kilims. So we decided to start exploring these interests together. I found someone on the southern side of Turkey who could produce the leather crafted products we had started designing and dreaming about. I used those pieces to make a name for myself on a nationwide retail website; the perfect platform for an unprofessional seller. In this way, I was able to create my company, Galen Leather, named after a precious stone I remembered from my earlier education.

Slowly my business began to grow. Since I was able to communicate with customers via email, I didn't need to worry about the fact that I couldn't talk. Even still, I knew the business needed something more in order to succeed.

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At this same time, my brother, Yusuf, had just graduated from an Economics program and was looking for a job. But he too was not interested in a traditional 9-5 job. So he started taking pictures for me, creating the most beautiful images to display the leather goods and pillows we sold.

For the next year we were able to slowly increase our business. During the 2013 Christmas season, we experienced an unexpected spike in orders. Contrary to what you might think, this actually threatened to end our entire company. Our vendor was not able to meet the demand and we were unsure if we would be able to keep going. Thankfully, we managed to pull through and keep our customers happy. Following this, our business returned to a semblance of normal until my husband asked for a leather journal for his Moleskine notebook and iPad. When I requested this from our vendor, he was not interested in helping and I knew we had to make some changes.

Yusuf and I decided to start producing our own leather goods. We started taking classes to learn leather crafting, learning from some of the best leather crafters in the area, as well as YouTube videos. It took several tries to create exactly what my husband had been looking for but we finally managed it, much to his satisfaction. Naturally, I was pretty ecstatic too! I was so proud of myself for what we had accomplished that I continued creating more and more things. Yusuf and I were able to create tech accessories and other specialty products. Everything was laser cut and stitched by hand. The business took off.

Today, I am healthy and have been able to return to my normal life. I can speak again and my husband, our four-year-old son, Cagan, and I are able to survive on the revenue from this company. Each day I am grateful for this life and I've never stopped experimenting and looking for ways to create new leather products that our customers will be interested in. We continue to provide high quality and beautiful products to our customers. With all the products being handmade, they are unique amongst themselves, meaning that each product is a creative work of art that our customers can show off to their family and friends. Our beautiful products are our pride and joy and it warms our hearts to know that when we create something new, you, in turn, will come to love them as well.

Zeynep Prens